

Oral History Project Interview
Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute (AMWRI)

Number of Interview: 1506

Date: September 29, 2015

Gender: Female

Name: Rana

Country of Origin: Jordan

Year of Immigration: 2004

Abstract: Family and the Muslim community of Milwaukee are the main focus in the interview conducted with Rana. Family and community have been a source of strife for Rana, instead of the comfort that many immigrants seek when beginning their new lives in America. In the interview we talked about several confrontations that occurred in Rana's life due to decisions she made that did not sit well with the enclosed Muslim community.

Key Themes: tradition, marriage, religion, cultural clothing

Note: In the transcript, I refers to Interviewer, and R refers to Respondent/Interviewee.

I: So, I'd like to start the interview by asking you some general questions about your background.

R: Okay

I: Um, where is your homeland?

R: Um, I was born and raised in Amman, Jordan.

I: Okay, and um, can you tell me about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of your time in your childhood?

R: Um, my dad, when I was three years old built a house, which we still have now, it's like in the suburbs, really, really, really far away from any towns, it's like 10 minutes away from small town. So there were not really any, any supermarkets or anything, there was a little corner store, one corner store. It was really cool because you get to walk outside, you get to go explore the mountains and have hikes.

I: So would you say you were more of an outdoorsy kid then growing up?

R: I was, I was a tomboy.

I: Yeah? So what about your school there?

R: My school, I had to go to like the little tiny town over to go to school. It was like 5, 10 minutes away. I had to take the bus every day to go to school, walk up the deep hill, steep hill, and I went to that school from 5th grade until I graduated high school. It was a really small school, so my class at most had like 20 students.

I: Wow, woah. So you said your dad built your house.

R: He paid someone.

I: How big was your house? How many rooms does it have? Who lived with you there?

R: We had 3 bedrooms. It was um, when they built the house, it was my 3 brothers in one room, me and my sister in one room, and then we had 2 more girls, so it was 4 girls in one room, and then my parents had their own room. The house had 3 bathrooms, one was a half, guest bathroom. Bathroom the master's room for my dad and my mom. And then one bathroom for us.

I: Oh boy, one bathroom for 7 people.

R: Uh, yeah. Well we could use the other.

I: You could use the guest bathroom or?

R: Or the masters.

I: Or the masters? So did you live in any other countries before coming to the U.S. or?

R: No, I just came here to America.

I: When did you immigrant [sic], immigrate to the U.S.?

R: When I was 19, July 10, 2004. That's when I moved here. I got, like I came here in September '03, but then I went back overseas, and I came here in July for a visit, and then I stayed here.

I: Well that's good. So then, how old are you now?

R: I am 30.

I: Woah, I can't believe I'm going to be 30 in just a few years. Um, so where, um so who all immigrated with you to the U.S. or were you by yourself?

R: Um, me, my mom, my dad, my brother, my two baby sisters, um we all got our papers together with my mom. My mom's the one who gave it to us, so when she got it, because we were all under 21, I.uh...we automatically get it with her. It's called a permanent resident card, or green card, that's what they call it. So since we were, even though I was 18 but I still got the papers with my mom because I was under 21. So by American law I am independent, dependent upon my parents.

I: And so, um, did you, did anyone come, immigrate after you guys came here, or did you all immigrate at the same time?

R: My sister got married and came here. But we did not all, so like my two baby sisters stayed overseas and they just come back and forth. One of them just moved here. My mom goes back and forth, when I first came, my dad was already here working, and my mom overseas. They are not divorced, but I don't know why they do that. But, I mean it's really difficult. I would not want to do that. Live somewhere, where my husband's somewhere else. And so I came with my dad, me and my dad.

I: So you're married. You became married after you immigrated to the U.S.?

R: Yes.

I: How did you meet your husband?

R: In college. At MATC.

I: What were you studering [sic] studying there?

R: Um, I enrolled to take general courses. In the beginning I was taking graphic design. That's what I enrolled in. I was taking like Algebra, some English, uh courses like basic skills for like reading and writing. Um, because I just moved. You know it's difficult, different you know then actually having to write essays and stuff. So I took the English preparation courses, and um me and him took an Algebra course together.

I: Aw, falling in love over math.

R: I know.

I: So, um, do you have any children?

R: Yes I do.

I: Well what are their names?

R: I have 2 girls, Yasmine, like Jasmine, and she's 9. And then Nasreen.

I: (She asked me to say her daughter's name to make sure I could.) Nasreen.

R: Nasreen, she's 6.

I: So um, what uh, what grade are they in? They're 9 and 6.

R: They are 4th grade and 1st grade.

I: And um, you said you graduated high schools before you immigrated over here, was that the highest level of education you got?

R: No I went to college, university overseas for 1 year. That's uh, that one year when I came here and went back. So 2003, I enrolled in a university there. Then 2004 I came here for a visit. Not knowing I am going to stay forever. So I didn't have all my stuff.

I: Oh no.

R: And then I just stayed. My dad decided to make me stay here.

I: So, did you ever work outside of the home, prior to immigrating?

R: Um, when I went to the university, I did like um, I got, it wasn't really much pay but I got a little job of um, in the university, of organizing a um, it's not really bookkeeping, but um organizing this guy, um he has an office, papers and stuff like that.

I: Okay.

R: Paperwork.

I: So um, you basically did a lot of secretarial work.

R: Yeah, it was part time, it was right after courses and stuff.

I: Okay, and um, so are you currently employed, or are you a full time student?

R: I am a full time student.

I: Okay, it's a hard job, with no pay.

R: It is, I was working for a really long time after I graduated. I just went back to school.

I: Okay, so um what were your main reasons for immigrating to the U.S.? Was it just because your dad wanted you to stay here or?

R: Well, my mom got her permanent resident card and I just came with her. And then I came for a visit, my dad pretty much told me I'm not going back, because when you have a permanent resident card you can't leave the country for more than 6 months. Or they give you diff, they could give you difficulties. So when I was entering the airport, I was 19, I was traveling alone.

Um the guy asked me how, the officer at the airport asked me how long I was gone for, and I didn't lie, you know, I said 9 months, and he was like "You better not do this too much, otherwise, you know there, you're going to face difficulties with the government. And then my dad tells, says I'm not going back. I was really mad.

I: Um, what were you, so why were you mad at him? Was it because you very happy with your life over there or going to college or just like?

R: Because I had friends there. I lived all my life there. My sisters were there. And um, it's just, that's all I know. For then to have to come to this place. You don't know your way around. You don't have any friends. It wasn't my choice, you know. I didn't get to know town first. I did not, I didn't drive at the time. I had no friends. I still kind of don't, but. It's I, I know my way around but 24/7, back then was like. My friends, my life, my sisters, you know. So I was really mad at him. I didn't want to stay.

I: And so, did your parents originally settle in Milwaukee, or was that something that happened later, or?

R: We came straight to Milwaukee. First, first time we came for a visit, we went to New Jersey, because I have 4 uncles there. Then my brother, right away he came. And then he started working here with my uncle. Then, because he was staying here, somehow, we all ended up staying here. And my sister that immigrated later, after us, after she, she um was over 21, so her papers were delayed, because now she's counted independent by government law. And um she got married, and now she is in Dallas, Texas.

I: Okay, so uh, what was your life like when you first moved here? Being a teenager who didn't really have any connections to the community and stuff.

R: Um, I had some uh, cousins. That uh were all younger than me, that I spent a lot of time with. Um, they are, they were not very good friends to me. I was just too naïve to see that, and I spent a lot of time with them. Then I enrolled in college. I was trying to take care of my dad, going to college, and then I got a job, and then I was full-time student, full-time employee, so I very much just got really, really, really, busy. But I spent the other, from the time, maybe like 2 months after we came here until, forever, I was just seeing my husband, who was my boyfriend.

I: Did you have any obstacles that you faced when you moved here?

R: Of Course!

I: Like what?

R: It's a different culture, different way people dress, different way people talk, English is not that good of a language. Um...Um, even when I first met my husband, you know it's like, he's totally from a different world from me. It was different, it was hard to explain why I could not just date him in the open, why I don't party, why I don't drink alcohol, why you know all kinds of stuff. It's hard to explain to people. They don't, you're, you're the odd one, because you're different. And, I not having, not knowing anybody, not knowing your way around, it's always hard, difficult. Not having good friends you know kinda sucks.

I: So um, did you learn to drive after you came here or um?

R: Yes.

I: Yes? Was that difficult or?

R: To learn? No.

I: To learn to drive.

R: No. My dad, in the beginning it was. It's always hard when you learn how to drive, it doesn't matter where.

I: Mhm. And when did you learn, when to drive? Was it shortly after arriving, or did it take a couple years.

R: It was a little bit after, like one year after when I arrived. When my dad, not even one year. It was like 10 months after I came here. He put me in some driving lessons, and then um he took me on the highway, in the construction zone, and he told me to drive away.

I: So uh why did you want to drive, or why did you want to learn to drive?

R: Because I wanna you know go around. It sucks, taking the bus took a really long time. I mean I went everywhere by myself in the bus, you know. I learned how to use the bus, but then I wanted to drive, and I did. And I went and got a car, because I had a job now to get a car. So I did all that, you know. My dad obviously helped me, with a little signature, but I did everything else, you know.

I: So um, what kind of jobs have you had since immigrating to the U.S.?

R: My first job was working at Dunkin' Donuts, I was 19 and it was like Dunkin Donuts and Baskin Robbins on 27th street. Um, I did that, then I worked in a nursing home. Then I left that within 3 months, 4 months. That was like the hardest job. Nursing Homes, its nasty, people there are different kind of, people that work there, different kind of people. You know what I mean. And then, it's the first time I saw dead person, was in a nursing home. Older lady died. Then I worked at Lowes for 2 years. Then I worked at Dynacare Laboratories, as a phlebotomist, which is the person that takes blood samples, for almost 5 years.

I: Okay, um, so what role, if any, did your family have regarding decisions about your employment?

R: Um, I mean they tried to tell me, like my dad did not want me to work at Dunkin Donuts, he wanted me to get a better job, like Western Union. Not Western Union, yeah Western Union,

place to transfer money. So, I applied there, but I didn't get the job, but I went, applied to Dunkin Donuts anyway, like when he wasn't there because I was tired or bored of not having money. So I went and got that job.

I: Does your family have still about the same level of involvement in your life or have things changed.

R: After I got married or after I immigrate?

I: After you got married. Well, now, like in your life now.

R: Now, um they try to force their opinion. I just respect my dad's opinion, but everybody knows, I do what I want to do, and I mean I still respect their opinion, maybe I would avoid telling them out of respect, but I still do the way, things the way I want to do them.

I: Okay. So uh, what level of education does your husband have?

R: My husband started college, then he opened his own business in construction.

I: And uh, can you, thinking back on your life, shortly after you immigrated, can you tell me about the places and buildings that you spent a lot of time in your first few years after immigration.

R: Um, well, life is phases. It depends on which phase you are talking about. So, am I talking about when I wasn't going to school and was working? I was home a lot. When I was working and going to school, I was never home. I was always in school building, because you know, I was taking 15 credits or I was in work building. So it depends on what part of person's life we're talking about.

I: So what about before you went to school. What was your house like?

R: Well, my brother rented a 2 bedroom apartment. So we stayed there. 2 bedroom, 1 bathroom. It was just a regular standard apartment, carpet on the ground, you know, small bathroom and small kitchen. You know how apartments here are.

I: So, was that difficult being stuck in a very small area, without any, without anything to really do? Is that why you went into schooling, or?

R: Yeah, that was hard. I went to school right away, 2 months after I came here. But um, I took one semester off, because I faced some difficulties with uh my family, um everybody trying to get involved, saying that I shouldn't go to school. That was part of it, because people, my cousins, the ones I told you I thought were my friends, they were like talking bad about me. So everybody thought that I was this really terrible bad person that does a lot, everything wrong. Like I was 19, they thought I was going to the clubs, really?! You can't go to clubs when you're 19. You got to be 21. But yeah, so my family, my uncles, from both sides, my mom and my dad's sides, tried to tell my parents how uh I shouldn't be in school, and how this and that. And, so I stayed home for one semester. That was very boring, difficult.

I: Okay. So uh. In your culture how are women viewed, and what is their typical role?

R: Depends on who you talk to, but majority have a double standard. Which is everywhere, not just my culture. Double standard, um, it's okay for a man to smoke, but it doesn't look nice on a woman. I don't think so, smoking is bad for both of your health. Or a lot of times, the thing that I don't like, is its okay for a guy to have a girlfriend, why it's not okay for a girl to have a girlfriend, because she's the family's name, well your son is the family name too. Even my cousins that grew up here, they say, oh if a guy gets very much, if a guy gets a girl pregnant it's not a problem, but if a girl gets pregnant, then she's the one with this kid in front of everybody. To me it's the same thing. God does not judge a man that commits an adultery different than a

woman that commits an adultery, but society do, everywhere. So women don't get the same equality, not in all households, but in many households. Which is, I don't agree with. I don't think just because I'm a girl I should do all the dishes. No, I work, or we both work, so you should get up and do dishes with me, and help me. Just because you're the man of the house, does not mean you shouldn't, you know. But I can, I live a lot different than the rest of...my husband is the one not from my culture. Even though he adopted a lot of our habits, but he knows that sometimes I'll settle down, because I know it's a really big problem, but he knows that I am very, very hard headed, so I will do like, he knows I'm bossy, he knows I don't listen. He knows I do what I want to do, just as me. So it works well because of whom I'm married to. But many, many Arab men would help their wives, they will comfort their wives, like his buddy, he wakes up in the middle of the night to feed his baby, so his wife doesn't have to. But, not everybody is like that.

I: What cultural aspects [cough interrupts question] has your husband adopted?

R: Um, uh, like uh, outfits, like clothing, about what's proper, like he's more going towards "This is too short, this is too tight, this is..." that kind of stuff. But I think he's always like that. I think it just got more put in him. Um, he stopped drinking after he converted to Islam, for example. We pray on and off. Those are um, not just cultural, those are religion things. Um, uh cultural things is uh that he does, that we do a lot all the time now, after dinner we drink tea. It's almost like a tradition now, all the time. His friends, two, his two friends are Arab, so you know, we hang out with them a lot. But we still have, obviously his family we still have contact with them. So there's still some influence from that side as well.

I: So what are some of the ways that you balance your faith and your marriage identity?

R: I keep my fast, I fast every year, in Ramadan. I don't skip that at all. Even though when I worked, even though whenever I did anything, I just kept, you know, that. Praying, I used to pray every day all day, like 7, 5 times a day. Never skip a prayer. But then, you just get so busy, you start to forget to pray. But that's because life is busy, but that's why you are supposed to keep up with the prayer. And um, that it bothers me a lot that I don't pray all the time, and it just became a lifestyle, that I forget to pray. Uh, another thing is a lot of people give me advice about covering, wearing the hijab. I don't, and I believe that is part of, I always didn't. Na, I was never as a girl that would, even before I moved here. But I think living here made me adopt that more, than I. I know a lot of people would say that "it's god's will" and "I have to do it" but I don't feel I have to, because, look how everybody else dresses around us, and so like, you know I don't like where some short stuff, and show too much, you know what I mean. So I feel like I'm keeping it balanced in that, I'm not 100% covered, but I'm not 100% the other way. Or like having independent [sic] independence, mean who I am, my personality. I became much stronger woman. I became tougher. I have an opinion and I feel like in my family and my friends, people very much always respect and listen to me.

I: So how did your religious or ethnic upbringing contribute to who you are today?

R: I believe that my upbringing made me a really good person. Um, it made me, um, not steal for example. Not just from people, you know. It made me not cheat people in anyway. I believe if I cheated you, that it's um, it's going to come back to me somehow. And it's not just that it's going to come back to me, I think even if it's not going to come back to me, I think about how would you feel after you find like I sold you a crappy car or a crappy house, you know. So it put really good morals in me. I don't lie, um, I respect people's houses, I respect people's feelings, um, I'm a good host, all those things came from my upbringing. And uh from my tradition.

I: So what does marriage mean to you?

R: Um, marriage its, it I can't refer to it as a job, because you know job is like something you just do. But it's something that need constant work, need compromise. Um, you can't make everything a work, because it's not going to work. Sometimes you just got to take a loss, and...and let that person let out their anger or do what they want to do, sometimes you have to tell that person the way that you want things done. It's about working together. It's not just about one person doing all the housework. No, it's about helping each other. That makes it easier. It's about, like my husband he does his own business, he does construction. I have went to construction sites with him. I have went to run errand for him for picking up supplies or picking up checks. Even though I'm still a mom and a student, I'm a house wife, you know, I am all those responsibilities, but make things easier for him. In the meantime, for example Sunday, I woke up I found him, he vacuumed, he did the dishes, he cleaned the bathroom, he did everything. So it's about, that's like part of working together. The other thing is respecting each other's feelings. What does this person like and not like, do what they like. You know, trying to comfort them, trying to be there for your, for your significant other. So it's, it's more about working on the relationship. It's about giving the relationship physically, you know, by the labor work, emotionally, listen to that person, be there for that person that you're married to, consider that person's feelings. It's, its many elements.

I: What factors play a role in marriage, like what are the, what were the first characteristics you looked for in...for a husband?

R: Well I didn't know I was going to marry him, especially since he's an American. I, I, I like I never thought that would happen, you know. I'm very sure I was like one of the first few girls to marry a guy out of my zone, in the community, you know. I got married like 10 years ago, all the

other girls are still marrying Arab people at that time. Um, he, obviously he, he, I thought he's attractive but that's not how we met. Actually we were doing work together for a class. And then I thought he's cool and then I thought he has a nice personality. But I'm not saying I just look for physical attraction but I thought he has a really like is always nice, would help me, he is caring. So that made me attracted to him, but I never really thought I would marry him.

I: Would you move because of marriage or relocate because of marriage? Or is that something you would not consider? If you had not married your husband in Milwaukee.

R: Um, I don't know. I think that depends if I would know the person like the way I am now, not 10 years ago or whatever, 11 years ago, the way I am right now, if I don't know the person, I don't think I would go to a place for someone else. Just because you never know how that person could be. They could be a really great wonderful partner, or they could be a really bad, abuser one. So right now, if I don't know the person, no.

I: So uh, can you tell me about any wedding or ceremonies that you went through? Possibly, if you did, because I know your marriage to an American would be a little bit different.

R: It was much different. We tried to make it mix between Arabic, Arab and American wedding. It, it's um, everybody was not happy in the wedding, so it, it was different than all the other weddings, you know. Um, it's not an American wedding where the girl walks down the aisle. But it's not an Arab wedding where the guy come, takes the girl out of the dad's house, you know, her dad or her brothers walk her out of the house giving, just like walking out of the house to give her to the husband or the groom. So it was a little mixture of both. The um, so I actually went, I walked in the hall and then um, something the uh Sheikh of the mosque did, it's like the priest, you know. Um which is they don't do that usually, he actually did come to our hall and he says will you take this man as your husband, would you take this woman as your wife. Um he

said that because he really liked my husband, my husband was Muslim before we married, he was always in the mosque and um, he did it for him, which uh was really good in front of my husband's family. So you see, then we have Arab music, which is, the girl first she walks in the Arab music and everybody's dancing in the hall. So it was like a little mixture of both. So he even though we had did that in the mosque, uh of 3, 4 weeks before the fact he still came to the hall to do it in front of my husband's family. But he does not do it for all the other American people that get married to white girl, to Arab girls. Which is really interesting because I think we were one of the few people to do that mix.

I: Okay, and so uh...um obviously a lot of these don't apply.

R: That's okay.

I: Um, how open are your parents when it comes to marriage outside of your religious or national group?

R: They were not.

I: They weren't?

R: Um, they, everybody looked really, really angry in the wedding so. But now my parents love my husband. They really do now. But in the beginning, you know, they were like, my, no, none of the people were, were like, you know. It was not like how they would be at other weddings, dancing, and happy, and all that kind of stuff. They just, all my uncles, everybody, and then my uncles stopped talking to me anyway. Except one. I have an aunt in Milwaukee, 3 uncles in Milwaukee, and beside 1 uncle, he comes to my house once a year, my dad's at my house, beside that, they all very, even they, their wives, I see them in the street, they don't even say hello to me anymore. Like they cut me off. I'm like out of the family now.

I: That's awful. So um what were like the specific obstacles you faced due to your marriage or intermarriage?

R: Um, it was really hard for me to have my uncles just cut me off like that. Because I was always by them. Like as much as one of my uncles went to Florida, and he left me with his 4 girls to watch them, you know I was like 19. So I was an adult. But how can you just cut me off like that. He's wife would see me all the time and act like she didn't see me. And now it doesn't bother me anymore. I told you I came a long way, like I really don't care. Um, people tr..., always treat me different still. Like when me and my husband go out to the Arab store, um it's like the Arab grocery store, um everybody stares at me, at us. The other day me and my sister were at Victoria's Secret, not the other day but like in June, and this lady kept pushing, asking me who I'm married to. Because she knows my family is very, very famous or my uncle's name is very, very famous here. Not me, nobody knows me. I'm like anonymous. But I guess they do kind of know me a little bit. Um she asked who I was married to over and over again and I finally told her I'm married to an American guy. She was quiet for like 30 seconds she was speechless, no words, you should seen her face expression. It was priceless. She like looked like someone just showed her something scary or shocked her. And then she's like oh well as long as he's Muslim and he's good, that's all that matters. She did not talk to us after she found out my, and I have had people ask me the oddest question ever, like I will meet, you know my daughter will make friends with someone, I will get invited and I take my daughter, cause I always take them everywhere, like to be there for them, they so young to go on their own. And like, this lady asked me, is your husband Muslim? I looked at her and I said are we allowed not to marry a Muslim person? I mean some people do it but I wouldn't do it, because I'm, I know I have to answer to God, but people ask me such dumb questions like that. Or does your husband take care

of you and give you money, I don't know, does your husband take care of you and give you money? So I get those like really weird questions. They refer to me as the girl, that Atshan girl married to the white guy. Yes! Yes. So, I get, my sister told me though they, they say I'm like stuck up and I don't talk to people but why would I talk to people? People are just rude to me, you know? Wha- you're odd, when I go to like my kid's elementary school, everybody there is very much the same kind of race. A few white people, so we fit in that category, few. And I don't cover my hair, so I'm like extremely outcast there.

I: So um, what um, what's your major?

R: I'm a math major.

I: And why did you decide to choose that?

R: Um in the beginning I was enrolled in graphic design and I didn't know what I was going to do. But then I took calculus. I fell in love with math afterwards. Well, I always like it, I was always good at it. But really calculus, how good I was in calculus attracted me to math a lot.

I: Yeah? Um when it comes to a marriage, when it comes to marriage who makes the most decisions? Obviously, you had your decision, but in your family does your mother or father, or?

R: My dad always consulted my mom, which I thought was very nice. He never just like...once in a while he be like that's it, or she would be like that's it, that's the way it is. But I feel that we've got very good liberty in our house. Always did. We still, our house do too now.

I: So um, do you think the internet, facebook or social media for Arab and Muslim Americans to meet their like future spouse?

R: I, I, I don't know because I did not use it like that myspace or facebook or any of that stuff.

But I think that's just ridiculous that people would use the internet to meet other people. Because

I can type you a paragraph and be the sweetest person ever, but that just means that I'm a good writer. Does not mean that I'm a sweet person.

I: So how is marriage in America different than your parent's way of marriage?

R: Well people here um, I mean I think its okay for people to meet people in school or something. I don't think people should meet in a bar because they're drunk. It's not the place to meet people, you know. Um, I'd, I feel it's, why would someone live with someone and have kids with someone so many years without even being married. Yeah. I think that's the oddest thing about marriage in America. The, it's just, you know, I like, why would you not just get married. So many people live together for so long, they don't get married. Or so many people live together for a while, then they get married. And then people would like wanna, I've had, when I worked in a hospital, girls all the time would ask me that how would I know this is the right person, for you know, to intimate with, if I uh, before because you did not try that with that person before marriage. I didn't, I didn't even like think about, or look at that when I first met my husband, you know. So that, I don't know just, eh, it just kinda. I believe if you meet someone and you love them, then you be satisfied with that. That should not be a priority and I think that's why many relationships here fail.

I: Okay, um, a family which has more than one daughter has like marriage rescript, restrictions and a process that are different between the oldest daughter and younger daughter. Is that like something that you've noticed or?

R: No, not in my household.

I: Okay, do you have an older sister?

R: I have 3. One is married.

I: Okay, and how was your sister's marriage different from yours?

R: She did not know her husband before, she not have relationship before with him. Obviously she agreed on him, you know. My parents never forced us. So when you say tradition marriage it's not a prearranged marriage where from the time she's 5 they say "That's it, she's marrying this guy". No, actually um, the way that that marriage would work, the guy would go to the girl's parents' house, see the girl, and if he likes her he comes back again. And that's how my sister got married. And they were, you know, the uh dating period is actually the engagement. But they make it official because they're trying to avoid committing the sin of adultery. Which is against God in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. And you know, they get engaged. And many people got engaged, broke up the engagement, some people stay engaged, and then they get married. They don't live together until after the wedding.

I: So, now let's discuss parenting. In what ways if any do you think boys should be raised differently than girls?

R: I don't think boys should be raised differently than girls. I think both of them should have chores around the house. I think uh, both of them should have the same expectations as for the education and respect around the house. I definitely, definitely think that um girls should be taught self-defense, just like boys can be taught how to fight, so they can defend themselves.

I: Okay, and do your children attend public school, community school, or Salaam school or other?

R: My children go to Salaam school.

I: They do?

R: Yes.

I: And why, what was reasoning for the decision for sending them to Salaam school?

R: Um, I, I put a lot of time into my kids. I do homework with them, I do activities with them, I watch movies with them. And sometimes I wa-, take walks with them. I don't have patience to teach them Arabic and all of religion on my own. So I can help them fill out with the homework. But I can't teach them Arabi (العربي), you know, I don't have the patience, such good patience. So I decided to just let them go to Salaam school and that way they can just learn it there and I help them with the homework.

I: Have you had any major issues that you have had to face while raising your children yet?

R: Um, nothing extremely big. They just talk back sometimes, they have attitude sometimes. They're still young, they're still babies. You got to watch out for the TV, TV influence on them. Friends influence on them. Um my husband's family is American Christina and obviously I'm Muslim. So there's a conflict there, having to explain to them the conflict about uh, you know, what Christians do, what Christmas is about our Eid, about morals. My husband's cousins, boys and girls date, wear ind-, improper clothes. My mother-in-law also have, does certain things too, she's divorced and everything. I don't really want to get into it right now. That is against our life style, and against our religion. So they can cause a bit of, uh, confusion in the kids, so you have to explain that. At the same time you have to make the holiday, our holiday, as good and great as grandma's Christmas is. 'Cuase, you know, its grandma's house. It's fun, there's gifts, there's nothing about it, that is like when you're with mom and dad.

I: Mhm, do you have any particular fears for your daughters being raised in America?

R: Dress code is not like my biggest concern, as long as they wear like proper clothes, not like skanky clothes. Um, I worry about my kids, um because everything leads towards dating and sex in our life, commercials, TV, in the streets, dress codes, clothes everywhere. It is so difficult to find a girl a skirt that is not up to her butt cheeks when she's 7. Okay, so the influence of society,

making everything okay scares me, and I worry about if something ever happen to my kids and then I don't have them anymore. I worry about um, you hear about all these people that we used to know when we were younger. This person is on drugs now, this person is in jail now, this person, I don't know, smoke pot all the time now, this person got 5 kids from 5 different dads. All those things make me worry about my kids, well I put, tried to put really good morals in my kids, maybe not as religious as I would like to be. Not just with the clothes and the coverings of the hair, no, but as uh teaching them more about religion and following more religion stuff. Well that's my biggest fear something they take the wrong path, or they date someone or, er, for most likely I would let my kids live with me until they get married, I'm okay with that. And I'll pay for college, I'm okay with that too. But if they start dating someone, or they marry someone that hits them or you just never know where life brings you. Just look at everybody from when you were younger, and you'll be like oh my god, this person is in this situation, everybody got problems. Even I do, and I just hoping that my kids will have a better life than that.

I: I think that's true for most parents, not all parents, that they worried that something will happen to their kids that will damage them more than we can handle. Um, what kind of husband would you like for your children?

R: um, I this is going to sound a little crazy. I definitely would like my kids to stay, to marry somebody that is Muslim, because that is ordered by God and that's what God wants. And I would want the best for them. I don't know what I would do if they would marry someone who is not Muslim or if, for example if they marry a Mexican guy or a Black guy. I'm not a racist I talk to all different kinds of people. Even though my husband is white, they find somebody like my husband, they will be lucky, you know. But, it's just, I don't want them to get married young like I did. I'm going uh encourage them to focus on school and going to school before they want

to get married. Finish college, perhaps Masters. First is gonna, they're going to be 5 years older. They're going to be more mature. And they're going to decide, is this a person I want to marry or not. I'd listen to them, like come on, everybody got emotions; I don't care what anybody says. All boys and girls get emotions, so, I'm sure eventually, my kids I mean have already told me they like boys, both of them. I was open to it, as much as I could. But, that is what I would hope, that they stay with the religion.

I: Okay, so the next question is about your culture and how you define yourself. How do you identify yourself?

R: I identify myself, I grew up as Palestinian. But I feel like I more belong to Jordan than Palestine, because I lived there for like the first 19 years of my life. I grew up there, my passport is Jordanian. Um, that's where I have really good memories, you know. Palestine, I mean I've been there twice, I did not even enjoy the visit. I also identify myself as an American because I live here, I pay taxes, I, I, I vote. So I am an American and Jordanian, I'm also Muslim.

I: Okay, so at home do you speak English and Arabic or?

R: Mainly English, a little bit Arabic. It's very difficult to teach, I would like. I would've liked to teach my kids Arabic, but for the moment they go to day care, picked up by their dad. On days off they stay at home with their dad and I was always working. It was extremely difficult to enforce the language when they're younger. But part of it was kind of my fault, for not doing it from when they were really young. But again, you're talking to a one and a half, two year old in Arabic, and she looks at you like she doesn't know what you're saying because everywhere else there's English, TV, home and Daycare. And it's nearly impossible to teach them Arabic. But they understand me, as far as I know it, 90% of the stuff I say they understand it. But they

answer English, and I'm very sure, everybody you had kids who were Arabic native speakers have the same problem that lives here now.

I: So I know we discussed this earlier in the interview, but how would you describe your religious life? You said that it's gone more to the wayside, as life has gotten busy.

R: I do fast every year, make sure I do that. My praying is on and off. It's kind of a bad thing that I always feel bad about because I used to pray every single day, 5 times a day. But being busy from going to school and working, or going to school or being a mom, working and being a mom and then the rest of the responsibilities. It's kind of I forgot about praying, but then it became a habit of forgetting instead of it being a habit to pray. Which is a habit I have to reinforce on myself very, very soon, because I believe it is necessary, it keeps your connection between you and your God and it puts good habits in your children's hearts and it becomes their routine. Um, I talked to God maybe not as much lately as I would like to. Um, for a while I wondered if god was really there or not for me. But you know, now I know he is.

I: How would you describe your political participation in the U.S.?

R: I am a person that believes voting is very, very important. I didn't believe so before. But if every single goes and vote we would not have Scott Walker in office. I'm just saying, when he called in a 2 million vote. We only had less than a quarter million go vote, how? If...it amuses me. I drove 20 minutes to my old house to vote against Scott Walker. Because when it was that election, 2012. We had actually just moved and they would not let me vote since I had been living there for 28 days. So I drove for 20 minutes, then I drove the 20 minutes back. So voting is very important to me.

I: So have you voted in, which elections, obviously the uh...?

R: Governor one, presidential one, at one election that we went to it was uh a court house, it was the sheriff of, police chief sheriff, whatever they call him. And it was a bunch of different people in Wisconsin, so I voted for that one as well so. I vote as much as I can.

I: Do you read the daily newspaper?

R: No.

I: No? So how do you get your news?

R: My husband, he follows up on the news all the time. He doesn't read the newspaper, but he reads all the outlined articles.

I: Yeah, and uh, do you...?

R: I don't watch any news, I'm sorry to interrupt you.

I: It's fine.

R: Because, okay, here on American news is different than what you will here on the Arabic news. And everybody always says what they want you to know what they want you hear. It's not legit, that's why I don't waste my time on the news. But something like when Sandy Hook happened, I watched the news that day. But like, it was such a heart breaking, something like that you know or a big event. I can tell you politics, they're so full of shit. Excuse my language, I'm so sorry. That's why I don't watch the news.

I: It's fine. I would have to agree, it's really hard to sift through what is fact and what is hyperbolized fiction. They they've just added on to sway one way or the other. So, what are your connections with your homeland? Have you visited recently or?

R: I visited in 2003. I'm sorry 2012. Sorry about that. 2012 was the last time I went, before that it was 2005, so there was a 7 year gap. It's extremely expensive and I cannot afford it. To go, even by myself, it is so costly. And last time I went my brothers actually helped me pay for that. My

brothers actually paid for my full ticket for me and my children. I was supposed to give one of my brothers a thousand dollars for my trip. For myself it was like \$1300 per ticket. That's expensive, you know, sometimes it goes up to \$1800 if you wanna go in the summer. And I was supposed to give him \$1300 and then when I went to give him the money he was like I don't want, that's, you went and that's it. So that's the only time I get to go. If I want to go, I'm going to spend 5-6 grand just on tickets. I don't have that kind of money. We are very low middle class, you know. I don't know how people can afford going every year. I can't. I need just a \$10,000 budget just to go overseas. I make a little over that every year, what am I supposed to do. How am I supposed to pay rent, you know?

I: It's very expensive, especially since a lot of the air-line companies are just raising prices more and more. Very sad. In what ways if any have political events in the human world affected you here?

R: Attacks on Al-Ghaza, I'm not sure how you say it Ghaza? Gaza? Gaza right? Attacks on Gaza from Israel is very, very sad. I worry about, um, there's a lot of revolutions in the Middle East since 2011. It makes me extremely, extremely worry about my mom and my sisters and my brothers. Because they live overseas. They come here but they normally stay there. So it's a constant worry. Syria was great, great country I remember when I was a kid. Now you look at it, it's just destroyed. We used to go Eid shopping, buy new clothes to wear for the next day. We right away buy the stuff that are from Syria because it's good quality. Why now Syria does not export anything anymore. So Syria is very sad. Egypt. Egypt, such rich history, a rich country, great country. And I understand there is always going to be corruption in the system. We have corruption in our system. I mean people don't see, it's not as obvious, but it's there. Any I know a lot about politics here and overseas. I'm very knowledgeable so I think outside the box, you

know. So I know there's corruption here, just like there's corruption there. It's just more hidden. And Egypt destroyed, Syria destroyed, Iraq destroyed. We don't have Iraq any more. Did you know Iraq used to give Jordan free oil before 2003? That's one of the main reasons oil was really cheap. Because it's given away. It's just destroyed now. All those, seeing all those kids getting killed in the Middle East is just it's heartbreaking. And the sucky part is everybody dehumanize everybody. So American's would say "Oh they're just Muslims, who care, oh we don't need any terrorist to grow up". Like really, like that's my Mother-in-law that's her kind of thinking. My husband's mom. You've got the Arabs on the other side think "Oh its okay if anything happens to Americans, who cares, they're almost not human." See everything is the same for Europe and Australia. And Australians and Europe think the same things about them. It's like those are human beings, Sandy Hook, those are little kids. It doesn't matter if they're White, Black or Jewish, you know Jews. Look at all the refugees that are dying. That 3 year old boy that was on the beach of Turkey. That's heartbreaking. How can anybody see that and just be okay with it. Why because they're not American? They're just sad. So I feel bad for all of the disasters anywhere, even what happened to the Jews, you know back in the 40s. As much as Arabs and Jews hate each other and dehumanize each other, I think it's obvious they're bombing each other every other month.

I: Every other week.

R: I really feel bad for what happened to them in the 40s. Most of Arab people would not feel the same way. But most Jews would tell you "They're Arabs they deserve to die." So it's a big cycle, but I feel bad for everybody.

I: You mentioned that your, that you have family back home, do you ever try and encourage them to move here?

R: My sister doesn't have a citizenship, we always tell her about coming here. She's 25. The only problem, she got her college education in Jordan, in Arabic. So if you have your education in English from another country, it's already difficult enough to get a job here. You have to like match your degree, take another 2-3 years of schooling. Where she just found a job and she just said she doesn't want to leave it right now.

I: Yeah, um so, were you, no you weren't in the U.S. during the Gulf War.

R: Nope, I don't remember the Gulf War.

I: Okay, so now I think we are going to switch to topics about cultural clothing. Um, do you have any tradition clothing? Cultural clothing?

R: Um, you know what a thub is? It's like a dress that has design on it, I can show you picture.

Um my grandma used to wear them. I don't have any, because I just don't feel it's my generation. When I was a kid, I told you that before that I was a tomboy, jeans, and hoodies, and hats, you know. And my mom would wear some, my dad just bought me some in April. And I didn't even try it on. I don't like that kind of clothing. I get it for my kids for school. My husband has some stuff like this [points to computer image], the man's ones. I don't, I'm a person that would wear jean pants all the time. Not um, you know, not dresses. I'm not a dresses type girl. But uh that, that's what it is. So that's what girls where for weddings now here, for eid. I wear a long black dress. I wear white dress on my wedding. I would wear the other style, you know the abaya, that is all black, of like that one girl that came to speak in our class how she's wearing. I will wear those when I go to the mosque. That's because my clothes are not long to cover for prayer, you know, I don't cover my hair so it doesn't really obligate me to wear longer clothes. My pants, they're probably too tight for the prayer anyway, they're too tight period. So I just wear that over whatever I'm wearing, it's just easier.

I: Did your mother wear traditional dresses?

R: I don't remember my mom wearing those. When we were growing up, but now she kinda does a little more. She wore like regular dresses, but my grandmas, both of my grandmas, this is the kind of even scarf they would have on. Both of my grandmothers wore them and a certain type of scarf. It's not actually hijab, it was like see through and they would wear it like that way. I will never forget my grandma that's all she wore, they would a little pocket hidden to put their wallet there. You can ask the next question. If you want.

I: Where were you when 9/11 happened?

R: I lived in Jordan.

I: Did that have any effect on you?

R: 9/11/2001 I was 16 years old, 16, sorry, 16 years old. So I did not, I felt bad, but I looked, I saw it on the news, but I mean I'm a 16 year old something happened in another country, would you really sit down and watch it? I'm a 16 year old you know. So I didn't really pay too much attention to, but now, because they replay it over and over and over on TV, it breaks my heart seeing all of those people jumping out of the windows. You know, it's just, it gives me goosebumps. I don't like watching it because of that. All the people that died in the middle.

I: So is there anything else about your history that you'd like to tell me?

R: Um, it wasn't easy growing up, middle child always sucks. Very, very difficult. Um you have a lot of responsibilities as a middle child and I was, my older sister covered up as well. Um, so it was a little difficult financially, first of all. Second of all being a middle child. Third of all just having certain responsibilities as a 12 year old should not have. I think I won't give to my kids now. So that was a little difficult. I've been through a lot of stuff in my life, that I probably would not straight up say them. It made me who I am today. It made me stronger, and in the

meantime it made maybe not as sweet as I used to be. But this is like what is required for our time for this life that we're live in. But in the meantime it made me a little too evil. Not evil, but a little too, sometimes can be, how can you say. Not crudal but have bad feelings for certain people in certain situations. I don't feel bad, or I'll do something and maybe 10 years ago I would have felt bad. That's where, it's a lot of bad stuff that made me into who I am today that I wish I did not go through them, but I am happy for who I am today. Because like, I'm strong, I'm independent. A lot of people listen to me, I don't know why. I am very respectful in my words. With my older brother it's evident enough. I call and I scream at them, they go do what I say. I don't know how, they just do. My husband's friends as well, you know. So it just that's who I am today. I wish I was who I am today, but in an easy way, not in such a difficult route.

I: So do you think there are any particular services or resources that the Arab and Muslim Women's Resource and Research Institute should provide to meet the needs of the communities.

R: I believe research are great and people would just say the truth, but 90% of people would not say really the truth. I mean I was a 100% honest about my answers right now. But how many more people are not. Like when you take a survey, about how many people are judged on their significant other. How many people do you think really answer the truth. Not that many. Same thing with if a lady in an Arab community is being um, or in any community, being uh physical abused or, being forced by her husband not to do certain things, or to do certain things. She would never answer the truth. So I feel like surveys and research are maybe pointless unless people are 100% truthful.

I: So, I would like to thank you for your time and sharing your experience with me.

R: You're welcome, thank you for interviewing me.

I: Uh, also, if I have any additional questions on anything, may I continue to contact you?

R: Yeah. Yes ma'am you can.

I: Thank you so much.

R: You welcome.